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# *The MCA Advisory*

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*The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America*

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**Volume 12 Number 6**

**June/July 2009**

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**Dues: \$30.00/Year \$50.00/2 years**

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## **Calendar**

**Annual Meeting August 7, 2009 at 3:30 p.m.**  
Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles, CA

**What's New on Our Website!**

**CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE EVERY MONTH**



## From the Editor

It was a delight to hear from Hank Spangerberger, a true pioneer in our hobby and the winner in 2007 of our Carl Carlson Award. Among other delights, Hank sent us a bill of sale dated 5/15/1971 for a Libertas Americana medal. Richard Picker, the knowledgeable dealer who sold the medal to Hank wrote:

Dear Hank,

Thanks very much for taking the piece of junk off my hands. However, if you ever get tired of it, you know I'll be interested. Meanwhile, here's the receipted bill. One of these days I'm going to get a photo unit, and when I do, if you want a PNG cert., I'll ask you to send it back. St. L. was a good show, and so was NY. Two in a row is quite unusual, perhaps things are turning around.

Kindest regards.

Sincerely,

Dick

And, Oh yes, the price of the piece was \$625.

A quick survey suggests that attendance at our A.N.A. meeting in August will be sparse. We say this not to discourage you but, quite the opposite, to encourage you to show up and be counted. If, Heaven forbid, the group is below fifteen we will stand drinks.

## Visit to the Hermitage

(by John W. Adams)

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, ye editor and his wife, Regina, paid a call on the Cabinet at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia. We were privileged indeed to be hosted by Prof. Dr. Eugenia Shchukina, the curator of West European and Russian Medals. Dr. Shchukina speaks no English but, having worked in the department for 59 years (!!!), her knowledge of

the collections is encyclopedic. She communicated to us quite fluently in German and French, unveiling one delightful tray of medals after another.

Parenthetically, the wooden trays and the cabinets were marvelously crafted, befitting such a prestigious institution. The medals were in open cardboard boxes, with attributions and information on provenance beneath them.

Almost all United States medals are 19<sup>th</sup> century and later. The War of 1812 is well represented (no pieces in silver) and had been viewed in an earlier time by Bob Julian. We believed there to be a John Paul Jones medal in silver in the collection but could not locate it.

Most of our time was spent in viewing European medals, which are arranged by country. We had heard that Peter the Great had assembled a large number of Dutch medals while building ships in that country, but this is not the case. There is a representative collection of Dutch medals obtained from various sources, none attributed to Peter I.

Like the Dutch, the British and French sections of the cabinet were solid with a number of peace treaty medals, but lacking in rarities. The former did contain a lovely example of Pistrucci's Waterloo medal in silver.

Throughout, Dr. Shchukina treated us with unflagging patience and courtesy. Her husband jokes that "her cradle is in the Hermitage" and, were it so, we could readily believe it. This grand lady is a fitting representative of a world class institution.

# **The First American Jewish Medal**

## **A Numismatic Trek ...Where no Researcher Has Gone Before**

(By Mel Wacks NLG)

As Robert Frost wrote, my recent research took me on a road "less traveled by and that has made all the difference."

I was aware that the very first American Jewish medal was issued to honor Gershom Mendes Seixas (1746-1816), the first native-born Jewish minister in the United States. I knew that the original die for the portrait side was in the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society. In the mid-1970s, when the Jewish-American Hall of Fame was preparing to issue a medal honoring Seixas, the American Jewish Historical Society made the die available to me and thus I asked Medallic Art Company to make a die impression in lead. In addition, at least one silver medal was actually struck from the die, and is now in the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society (fig. 1). This silver medal was later featured on AJHS membership invitations, where it was described as: "Medallion struck from die made for earliest known American medal of Jewish interest. Cast by Columbia College in 1816 to commemorate the death of Gershom Mendes Seixas, the Minister of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, and a Trustee of the College." But, it seemed that no actual medal struck from this die was known.

Thus, I decided to write an article about "The Most Famous American Jewish Medal ... that was Never Made." And that's when my research adventure began.

The first thing I did was to ask Dick Johnson, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of medals and medalists, if he knew of any extant Seixas medals. He kindly directed me to the Chris Neuzil oeuvre<sup>1</sup> which I happily had sitting in my library. Neuzil noted that: "Only modern uniface strikes from this die, which is in the collection of the American Jewish

Historical Society, are known. (Daniel) Friedenberg (1969, 905; 1976, 70) states that this die was made as a memorial in 1816, the year of Seixas' death."

I then googled the Seixas medal, and made two remarkable discoveries. The first negated all previous references that the die owned by the American Jewish Historic Society was commissioned by Columbia in 1816, upon the death of Gershom Mendes Seixas. In the *Early Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*<sup>2</sup> it states that on Feb. 7, 1812 "M\*- Seixas presented an impression in paper of a die cut by Fürst in this city (Philadelphia), of his father Gershom M. Seixas, on account of its superior execution." Thus the die was made sometime before this date, which was nearly 4 ½ years before Seixas died.

Secondly, a Google® Book match revealed an illustration of the Seixas medal<sup>3</sup>, accompanied by the text: "(Seixas') portrait appears on a bronze medal struck by Columbia University in his memory." Remarkably, the picture indicated that a new legend had been inscribed on the medal *after* it was struck from the die, reading "BORN JANUARY 14TH, 1745 GERSHOM MENDES SEIXAS DIED JULY 2ND, 1816." While this had been published in 1962, it evidently remained unknown to other scholars.

I thought it was time to go to the source, and emailed Columbia University. I quickly received a reply from Jocelyn K. Wilk, Public Services Archivist, who gave me the surprising news that: "We have a file on the Gershom Mendes Seixas award and I'm fairly certain there is information about the medal within the biographical file we have for Seixas. In addition, we have a physical example of this medal in our medals collection. Since the physical medal is stored in an off site location, please advise us of when you might schedule a research visit so we can retrieve it in advance of your visit."

When I advised Ms. Wilk that I was 3,000 miles away, she kindly agreed to scan the

medal and send me a picture. I asked for a picture of the reverse as well, if there was any design. She scanned the medal and sent me the picture (fig. 2).

Ms. Wilk indicated that there was no reverse, but just an incused version of the obverse. I asked her to send me a picture anyway. When I received the scan of the incused back (fig. 3), it was evident from the sharp details that this was a struck “shell” medal, such as the uniface silver “shell” medal made by Fürst, depicting a bust of George Washington atop a broad pedestal, as initially described in an 1817 catalogue.<sup>4</sup> When I made a mirror-image of the incused design subtle variations that were in this positive die became evident. For instance, the lettering AEAE (in HEBRAEAE) uses flat bottomed E’s on the front (fig. 4) and rounded bottoms on the back (mirror-imaged in fig. 5); and while these front letters are sharp, the back letters are double struck. Also, Seixas’ eyebrows are far more textured on the front than the back.

The Seixas medal in the Columbia University archives was actually a gift from Judaica collector Harry Friedman, as noted in a letter dated November 30, 1933<sup>5</sup> and therefore there is no evidence whatsoever that it was ever commissioned by Columbia.

Since Seixas’ son had presented an impression in paper of a die cut by Fürst of his father at a meeting of the American Philosophical Society on February 7, 1812, I googled the Society and found out that it was still in existence. Valerie-Anne Lutz van Ammers, Head of Manuscripts Processing and Library Registrar, speedily responded to my email and indicated while they did not have the said paper impression, she had a record of an embossed paper medallion of Gershom Mendes Seixas, 6.8cm (2 11/16”), that was acquired by Mikveh Israel Congregation (Philadelphia) in 1972. Could this be the same impression shown by Seixas’ son in 1812? Does it have the added inscription? Unfortunately, the archivist of Mikveh Israel indicates that he “could not find the item or any information about it.”<sup>6</sup> So we

may still have a bit further to go on the winding road less traveled to get the whole story of the first American Jewish medal.

So what has my research revealed?

1. The die for the first American Jewish medal, commemorating Gershom Mendes Seixas, was not made in 1816 – it existed as early as February 7, 1812.
2. There is no reason to assume that the die was commissioned by Columbia or even that the medal in the Columbia Archives was made by Columbia.
3. The silver “shell” medal in the Columbia archives was engraved after the death of Gershom Mendes Seixas on July 2, 1816 on a medal that was made sometime c. 1812 – 1816.
4. While Chris Neuzil indicates the size of the Gershom Mendes Seixas medal as 66mm., my measurement of the lead impression agrees with the records of the American Philosophical Society, that the medal is 68mm.
5. Question all “facts.”

### Notes

1. Chris Neuzil, *Moritz Fürst’s American Medals (Coinage of the Americas Conference at the American Numismatic Society, New York, November 8-9, 1997)*, p. 106.
2. *Early Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge, Compiled by One of the Secretaries, from the Manuscript Minutes of its Meetings from 1744 to 1838* (Philadelphia, 1884), p.433.
3. David Bridger Ph.D., editor, *The New Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1962), p. 438.
4. Chris Neuzil, p.96-7.
5. From Philip M. Hayden, Secretary, Columbia University in the City of New York to James T. Grady, 505

Journalism, in which he states in part: “(Seixas) was a leading Hebrew Rabi (sic) of his period, and was a member of the governing board of Columbia College, as one of the Regents of the State of New York from 1784 to 1787 and as Trustee from 1787 to 1815. The medallion is in silver and in relief, without any reverse, and signed, Furst, apparently the name of the sculptor. The President thinks that both the Times and the Alumni News might use a photograph of the medallion.”

6. Email to the author from Lou Kessler (April 15, 2008), in which he goes on to state: “I have inquired with our Rabbi, our Parnas (president), and past Parnassim. I have also inquired with Claire Pingle of the National Museum of American Jewish History (which was under our auspices in 1972).”

### Figures

1. Fürst: Gershom Mendes Seixas, 1970s, lead impression of original die in the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society, 80mm. (image 68mm.), Mel Wacks Collection, California (Photo: Mel Wacks)
2. Fürst: Gershom Mendes Seixas, c.1816, obverse (front), silver, 68mm., Columbia University Archives, New York (Photo: With permission of the University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York)
3. Fürst: Gershom Mendes Seixas, c.1816, obverse (back), silver, 68mm., Columbia University Archives, New York (Photo: With permission of the University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York)
4. Fürst: Gershom Mendes Seixas, c.1816, mirror image of obverse (back), silver, 68mm, Columbia University Archives, New York (Photo: With permission of

the University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York)

5. Fürst: Gershom Mendes Seixas, c. 1816, close up mirror image of obverse (back), silver, 68mm, Columbia University Archives, New York (photo: with permission of the University Archives, Columbia university in the city of New York.



Figure 1



Figure 2





Figure 3

## Response to Medal Finishes Article (by Pete Smith)

I appreciate the article by Ray Herz on “US Mint Medal Finishes 1860’s – 2008.” This is information that should be learned by everyone who collects these medals. While I believe the article is a good start, I would like to add a few comments.

1. Color: The color of medals shown in the photographs is indistinguishable while typical medals do show a variance in color. I don’t know if the problem is with the medals selected, the photography or the reproduction. Perhaps a future article can present a better representation of the color differences.

2. Finish: Referring to these all as medal finishes may be all right in common usage. I believe a technical discussion requires greater depth. A medal finish is applied after the medal is struck. The 19<sup>th</sup> century medals described as milk chocolate brown, dark chocolate, mahogany or cherry have an applied patina finish.

Coins do not receive an applied finish. Thus the term “coin finish” really means unfinished. The 20<sup>th</sup> century medals are unfinished.

3. Sandblasting: Bronze medals may be sandblasted to prepare them for treatment with ammonium sulfide (or other chemicals) which turn the medal black. The medal is buffed to remove the color from high points and impart an antique finish in protected areas. I do not see this finish on Mint medals.

For what we call a sandblast finish, I believe it is the dies that were sandblasted. Sandblasting a struck medal without applying a finish would damage the surfaces and hasten toning. My observation is that the surface of sandblast finish medals have raised bumps rather than pits.

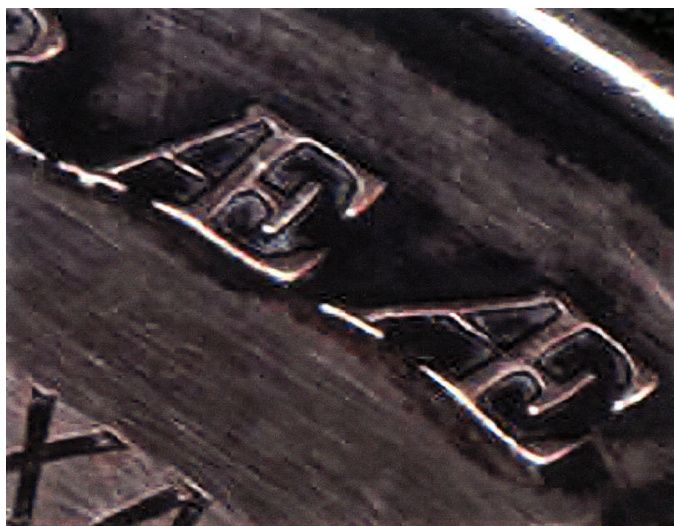


Figure 4



Figure 5

4. Toning: The 20<sup>th</sup> century medals change color because the unprotected surfaces react to environmental conditions. Toning spots may be found on medals still in plyofim envelopes. The 19<sup>th</sup> century patina finish protected the medal from toning, retained original color and required no special packaging..

5. Transition: The 19<sup>th</sup> century medals were struck in copper and have what is described as a bronzed finish. Medals with proof-like surfaces received what we may call the mahogany finish. Superintendent Oliver Bosbyshell ordered a change around 1892. The new method produced a matte finish we now call a chocolate bronze finish.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century medals were struck in bronze without a finish. The change came about when the Second Philadelphia Mint was closed and the new Third Philadelphia Mint was opened in 1901. Bronzed copper medals were sold as late as 1910 but some of these may represent remainders from earlier production.

Following is a quote from Julian, page XXIX: “Before the new building was finished, assistant Secretary of the Treasury Frank A. Vanderlip made an official inspection tour of the old facilities. He did not appreciate what he saw being done to bronze medals in the medal department. Upon his return to Washington he contacted the director of the mint and ordered that the new French method of finishing medals (i.e. sandblasted) be adopted. He also ordered that real bronze, as opposed to the copper used for the copper bronzed medals be used.”

6. Green: I have seen references to a green finish on some medals from the 1910-1920 era. I don’t know if this was a true green or just a greener shade of brown. Apparently such medals are elusive and highly prized. It is also possible to apply green patina to a medal outside the Mint.

7. Surfaces: The article refers to surface finishes as proof-like, glossy, sandblast, or satin. These surfaces were on the dies and were not added to medals after they were struck. Two dies produced in the same year could show a difference in the degree of sandblasting or the appearance of the struck medals.

8. Improvement: The article mentioned the improved appearance seen in a 21<sup>st</sup> century medal. This same improvement has been seen as new hubs are used for coinage dies. Apparently our current Mint staff believes that hair should have the appearance of the furrows in a plowed field. Hair lacks the subtlety produced by earlier and more talented artists.

9. Unfinished: The Mid-Late 20<sup>th</sup> century medal described as unfinished is no less finished than other medals produced since 1901. It just shows the possible variations in die surfaces.

10. Packaging: I believe that original packaging is often discarded or ignored. The article illustrates how this packaging may be helpful to date medals. It should be realized that the Mint often maintained a stock of medals so an earlier medal could be shipped in a later package. Medals may also be stored in boxes from a different era.

11. Discontinuation: There have been several times in the past when large groups of medals have been discontinued. An informed collector may be able to acquire a long discontinued medal for the price of currently stocked medals. Perhaps a future issue of the MCA Advisory can include a listing of medal discontinuation dates.

These are my opinions. I would appreciate contributions from anyone who may have a better understanding than I do.



[Pete – The breadth of your interests and depth of your knowledge never ceases to amaze us. Ed.]

## Historical and Commemorative Medals on Display in Philadelphia Museum of Art

(by Ben Weiss)

A group of medals from the Collection of Benjamin Weiss has been put on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The display consists of 16th and 17th century medals from Italy, France, Germany and The Netherlands. The medals may be found in the Gallery of Early European Art. The display is a part of Ben's larger collection of Historical and Commemorative Medals.

The medals have been placed in the same vitreen display cabinet with small bronze statues from the same period, as many museum curators consider medals to be, in fact, small sculptures. They were selected on the basis of their artistic value and how they related to other art objects in the museum. For example, the medal of Pietro da Cortona by Francois Cheron (8) was chosen because Cortona, along with Peter Paul Rubens, designed the wonderful tapestries, depicting the events in the life of Constantine the Great, that line the hall outside the gallery of the museum. The 16<sup>th</sup> century renaissance (c.1515) medal of Francis I by Giovanni Pomedello (1) serves as a complement to the portrait of this French king which is in an adjoining gallery.

The collection on display also consists of medals of the two important ministers of the French kings, Louis XIII and Louis XIV, namely, Cardinal Richelieu (10) and Cardinal Mazarin (5), respectively. The one of Richelieu is in lead by the great French medallist Jean

Warin and the large bronze medal of Mazarin is by an unknown artist. The French portion of this collection includes the bronze medals of Henri IV and Marie de Medici on the *Birth of the Dauphine* (1603) by the renowned French medallist Guillaume Dupre (2) and a medal of Louis XIV, *Massacre of the Huguenots* by the wonderful Italian medallist Giovanni Hamerani (9). This latter medal serves as an example of religious bigotry in medals as it appears to celebrate, rather than condemn, the massacre of the French Protestants (Huguenots) by the Catholic Louis XIV of France.

There are two silver medals of Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, by the great German baroque medallist Sebastian Dadler; one is on his *Victory in the Battle of Breitenfeld* (6) (issued in 1631) and the other commemorates his Apotheosis (7) (issued in 1634); the latter probably is one of the finest examples of German baroque medallic art of the period. There are also two 17<sup>th</sup> century bronze medals by the Italian medallist Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi of Queen Christina (3,4), the daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, who abdicated her throne and went to live in Italy in order to practice her Catholic beliefs, a practice that was forbidden in Protestant Sweden.

To complete the display, there are three 17<sup>th</sup> century silver medals by Dutch artists: one thought to have been engraved by Pierre Aury to propagandize the savage killing of the brothers, Cornelius and Johann Dewitt, by the supporters of William III of Orange in 1672 (11); one by Pieter van Abeele of Charles II of England on his restoration to the throne in 1660 (12); and one by Christoph Adolphzoon, commemorating the Peace of Breda (13), ending the Second Anglo-Dutch War between England and The Netherlands in 1660.



Ben Weiss with his medal collection in Philadelphia Museum of Art



Weiss Collection



## Letters to the Editor

Hello John,

The attached is a footnote to your 'Comitia Americana'.

Ref: 'Wedgwood Portraits and the American Revolution', no author, pub National Portrait Gallery / Smithsonian Institute, 1976.

The Wedgwood example of the Dupré medal looks to be a straight cast of the original medal, e.g. Wedgwood didn't create a new mould for this blue jasper ware piece. This is evidenced by the image and particularly the legends being weak and also the Wedgwood example is about 1/4 inch smaller in diameter than the original. The Wedgwood medal appears to have been made in 1789 when the Dupré medal was made public. The edge is impressed 'Wedgwood'. It is rather rare.

What I found most interesting was the background to Wedgwood's jasper ware. It appears that in the mid 1760s, a competitor gained control of the China clay pits in Cornwall and Wedgwood had to look elsewhere. He had an acquaintance who was a planter in South Carolina. Wedgwood had heard that fine clay, which he called 'Cherokee Clay,' could be found in South Carolina and asked his friend, Thomas Griffiths, to search it out and send him a supply.

After struggling against Indians and other trials, Griffiths found the clay and shipped five tons to Wedgwood.

Then the Revolution!  
Wedgwood certainly sympathized with the cause, but also was particularly annoyed because he lost customers as well as his supply of Cherokee Clay.

The war over, Wedgwood was able to gain access to Cornwall China Clay, which he used for his Creamware products, but preferred to continue to use Cherokee Clay for his blue jasper ware.

So the comment that was new to me is that the clay used to make the Wedgwood JP Jones medal is American clay!!

Best regards,

Sim Comfort



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**How did you learn about the MCA?**

**What are your collecting interests?**

**What would you see highlighted in MCA publications?**

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Ellicott City, MD 21042

Or email completed form to: [bdtayman@verizon.net](mailto:bdtayman@verizon.net)  
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